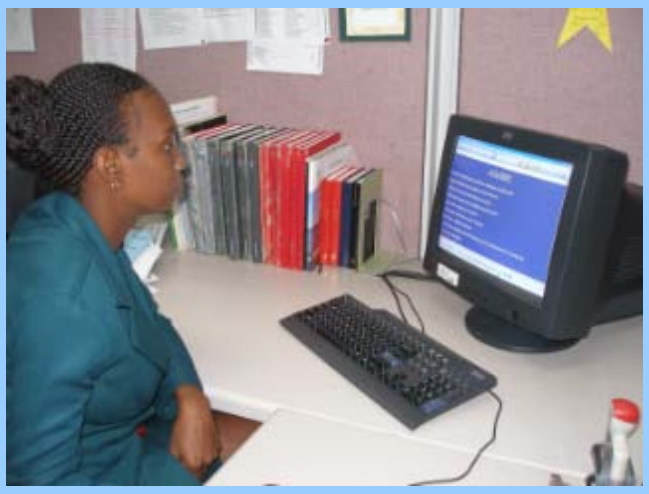
Records Management Procedures Manual for the Virgin Islands Public Service

2007



Records Management and Archives Unit
Deputy Governor's Office
Government of the British Virgin Islands
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Records Management Procedures Manual for the Virgin Islands Public Service

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Foreword

The Executive Council in May, 2004 endorsed a comprehensive action plan submitted by the newly appointed Chief Records Management Officer (April 2004) to establish an integrated National Archives and Records Management Programme along the lines recommended in 1998 by Victoria Lemieux, a Consultant from the International Records Management Trust.

Subsequently in April, 2005 the Executive Council also endorsed the policy on the principles, polices, procedures, plans and priorities of the National Archives and Records Management Programme. A copy of each of those documents is available from the Chief Records Management Officer upon request.

The Records Management Procedures Manual is being issued prior to the passage of the British Virgin Islands National Archives and Records Service Act. The Act will formally mark the recognition of improved records management as a support function critical to the efficiency, effectiveness and economy of government business, and as a key issue in the continuing administrative reform process. The law will cover current records in Records Offices, semi-current records and non-current records in Archives collections throughout Government Service.

Although the Archives and Records institution is not yet legally established, the programme under the policy, is committed as far as staff and accommodation resources would allow, to provide guidance on professional, efficient and consistent handling of Government records by implementing policies and procedures based on recognised principles and practices for the appraisal, organisation, maintenance, retention and disposition of Government records, including their systematic transfer to the Archives for preservation, arrangement, description and availability for research, reference and related purposes. The Records Management training courses, workshops and consultancies from which the Service has benefited, are examples of the strides that have been made since the initiation of the programme.

This Manual is another stride forward. It has been developed to underpin the recommendations of the Lemieux Report and the transition to well-

structured information systems. It provides detailed guidance on a range of topics relating to the provision of efficient and effective records services. It should prove a useful source of help not only to records staff but also to their line managers and trainers. I commend this work to be used for the steady improvement in the quality of records services and I applaud the Chief Records Management Officer and all who contribute so well to this development. I remain very excited about the prospects for archives and records management in the future.

Dancia Penn
Deputy Governor, 2006

Section One

Introduction

Introduction

1.1 Sound records procedures: the need

Neither the Government of the British Virgin Islands nor any other government could survive without written records. Because they are so important, records must be effectively managed at all stages of their existence, from their creation to their eventual disposal. Currently, responsibility for this rests with Permanent Secretaries and delegated officers within each Records Office, the Archives and Records Unit and the users of the records. The effectiveness of this partnership will depend upon the degree of understanding and co-operation between them. Authority for governing records is usually set out in Archives and Records Management legislation. There is currently no over arching legislation for British Virgin Islands records and archives. Existing legal statutes and regulations which govern some categories of records are, for example, **Financial Instructions, Section 164,** governing some financial records; **General Orders, Chapter 6.21- 33** and **Appendices 1 A & 1 B,** governing some aspects of Official and Personal Information, Correspondence and Records Management; and the **Registration and Records Act Cap. 67,** governing some Legal and Court Records. Some legal records are also covered elsewhere in Acts throughout the Virgin Islands Laws.

Reference will be made to facilities which do not yet exist in the Civil Service, for instance, 'Records Centre', 'Archives and Records Institution' etc. However, when the Virgin Islands Archives and Records Service Act is passed, new organisational arrangements and responsibilities will emerge along with commonly used terms in the literature.

This Manual describes the procedures for managing and maintaining current records. It also sets out procedures for transferring records to and retrieving records from the Records Centre or other storage once they are no longer in current use. It is intended as a generic guide for Records Office staff.

1.2 Terminology

In this manual, 'Records Office' is used to refer to the unit that creates and maintains current files. The manual refers to 'Archival Institution', 'Records Office', 'Records Centre' and 'Records and Archives Institution' in a general sense. The body that should control the Archival Institution, Records Centre and Records Offices is referred to as the 'Records and Archives Institution'. When written in lower case the term 'archives' refers to the materials; when capitalised Archives or 'Archival Institution' is used to refer to the Archives Repository itself.

1.3 Definition of Official Records:

Official records are recorded information in all formats, created and received by all government offices and bodies in conducting the business of Government. They include:-

- Correspondence, memoranda, reports, and forms whether in hard copy, electronic or other
- Maps, plans, or charts
- Photographs, prints and drawings
- Films, microfilms and videotapes
- Sound recordings

1.4 Functions of a Records Office

Records Offices exist in order to provide a service to the ministerial and administrative staff including action officers who need to use the records.

1.5 Responsibilities of Records Staff.

The essential duties of Records Office Staff are to:-

- Receive, record and distribute incoming and internally created mail of all categories (such as letters, memoranda and faxes)

- Open and index files, attach relevant papers and pass the files to action officers

- Build up and control all officially registered files and other documentation in their care, so that they can be produced quickly, by means of effective indexing, classification and tracking procedures

- Know the location of all officially registered files in their care and be able to produce them quickly, by means of effective indexing, classification and tracking procedures.

- Provide storage and reference services for all officially registered files and other documentation in their care.

- Record and arrange for the efficient and timely dispatch of all correspondence produced by the officers they serve

- Review and dispose of all outdated files or other records in accordance with retention periods as agreed between the records and archives institution, the organisation or department concerned and other relevant officials.

- Show users the maximum possible courtesy and co-operation

- Take every opportunity to learn the particular needs and requirements of the office and its action officers.

- React promptly to complaints by users, giving reasoned replies and explanations.

- Receive and actively encourage suggestions for improvements from users and implement them wherever possible.

1.6 Administrative Responsibility for Records Offices

Responsibility for the proper management of Records Offices may be shared with the Ministry and local line management with assistance from the Records and Archives Unit referred to generally as 'the Records and Archives Institution' The records and archives institution should be responsible for all professional and technical matters relating to the delivery of effective and efficient records services including inspection. Local line management may be responsible for matters regarding the welfare, discipline and non-specialist training of records staff as well as non-technical issues relating to Records Offices. The separate responsibility of these two management chains must be closely co-ordinated.

The officer-in-charge or Head of the Records Office has immediate responsibility for the day-to-day work of the Records Office and the service it provides to users of records. He or she liaises with the records and archives institution on any technical records management or procedural matters.

1.7 Responsibilities of Users

Well run Records Offices depend upon an active partnership between Records Office staff and users. Records staff rely upon action officers to:

- Deal with files promptly and return them to the Records Office when they are no longer required

- Use the 'bring-up' system when action on a file needs to be temporarily suspended

- Keep files free of ephemeral material such as duplicates, drafts, rough notes etc.

- Include the relevant file reference on all outgoing correspondence

- Give clear guidance if required, according to the Classification system, on how they wish their mail to be indexed.

- Provide the Records Office with completed file movement slip whenever they pass a file to another officer or elsewhere other than through the Records Office

- Co-operate fully with all necessary records checks, including censuses and searches conducted by the Records Office.

1.8 The Records Office and the Life Cycle of Records

Records Offices are concerned with files in the earlier 'operational' phases of their lives, when they are used for the purposes for which they were created. It is important, however, that Records Officers know how and when to pass files on to the Records Centre or other place designated for the storage of in-active records.

The Records and Archives Institution manages all phases of the life of a record in order to ensure that the information requirements of all the government or organisation are met efficiently. In addition to its responsibilities for Records Offices, it will manage the records centres and archival facilities.

1.8.1 The Records Centre is a building specially designed or adapted for the low-cost storage and maintenance of semi-current records pending their ultimate destruction or transfer to an archives Repository. It provides a central storage and retrieval service for semi-current records. Semi-current records are records that are no longer needed for day-to-day use but which must be kept because they have a continuing legal and financial value. By making regular use of the Records Centre, records staff would be able to provide users of records with access to semi-current records that are no longer kept in the agency. Use of the Records Centre would achieve economies by freeing up office space and expensive off-site rentals. Working conditions in Records Offices would be improved as the offices would be kept clear of files not needed for current work.

1.8.2 The Archives Repository

An Archives Repository is a building in which archives are preserved for posterity and made available for consultation. Those records which are of permanent historical and cultural value *are* preserved in the Archives Repository. Once records have reached a certain age, as defined by legislation or regulation, they should be open to the public for reference and research. The mandate of 'The Archives' is therefore to serve as the official repository to preserve, arrange, describe and subsequently make available for research and reference those non-current Government records of enduring value transferred to its care, custody and control, in accordance with approved records retention and disposition authorities. Detailed information about the various functions carried out by the Archives is provided in the position paper on Government Archives and

Records Management Programme principles, policies, procedures, plans and priorities.

Unlike libraries where patrons are permitted to browse through the stacks and borrow books, archives normally do not allow access to storage areas by researchers, nor are researchers allowed to take irreplaceable records out on loan. Rather than sanction the risk of returning archival records to a transferring office on loan, the Archives will encourage such offices to have a staff member visit the Archives to do research or to accept photocopies. Circumstances may dictate that in some cases loans are unavoidable, and if it is judged that a loan is the only recourse, it will be well-documented and short term in duration.

Until the Virgin Islands Government provides an adequate facility to properly store, process and make records available for research and reference in a reading/study room environment, those interested in viewing and examining material transferred to the Archives should contact the Government Archivist to discuss the matter.

1.8.3 Rescuing the Archives

Phase 1

For several decades Virgin Islands records dating back to the 1700s were stored without air-conditioning and care, in two small rooms in the Old Administration Building on Main Street. They were left to the mercies of heat, termites and other insects.

During the months of May to November 2004, the termite eaten, infected papers and non-records were cleared from the nucleus of the Archives and incinerated. The rooms were renovated- tiled, painted, lighted and air-conditioned. Two windows were replaced; new shelving was installed and records were roughly sorted and boxed with the assistance of John Cantwell, an archivist volunteer from the British Executive Service Overseas (BESO)

The photos are recorded here as a reminder that such neglect to the archives must never be allowed to happen again. We each have a grave responsibility for the total 'life-cycle' care of records – from the time they are created to the time of their final disposition – that is, when they are either destroyed or preserved for posterity in an Archives Repository where the care is continued.

Insect-infected room and records.

DEXION

LEHIGH

Chief Records Management Officer Mrs. Verna Penn Moll with John Cartwell, BESO Archivist.